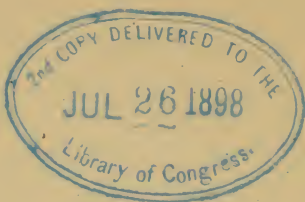


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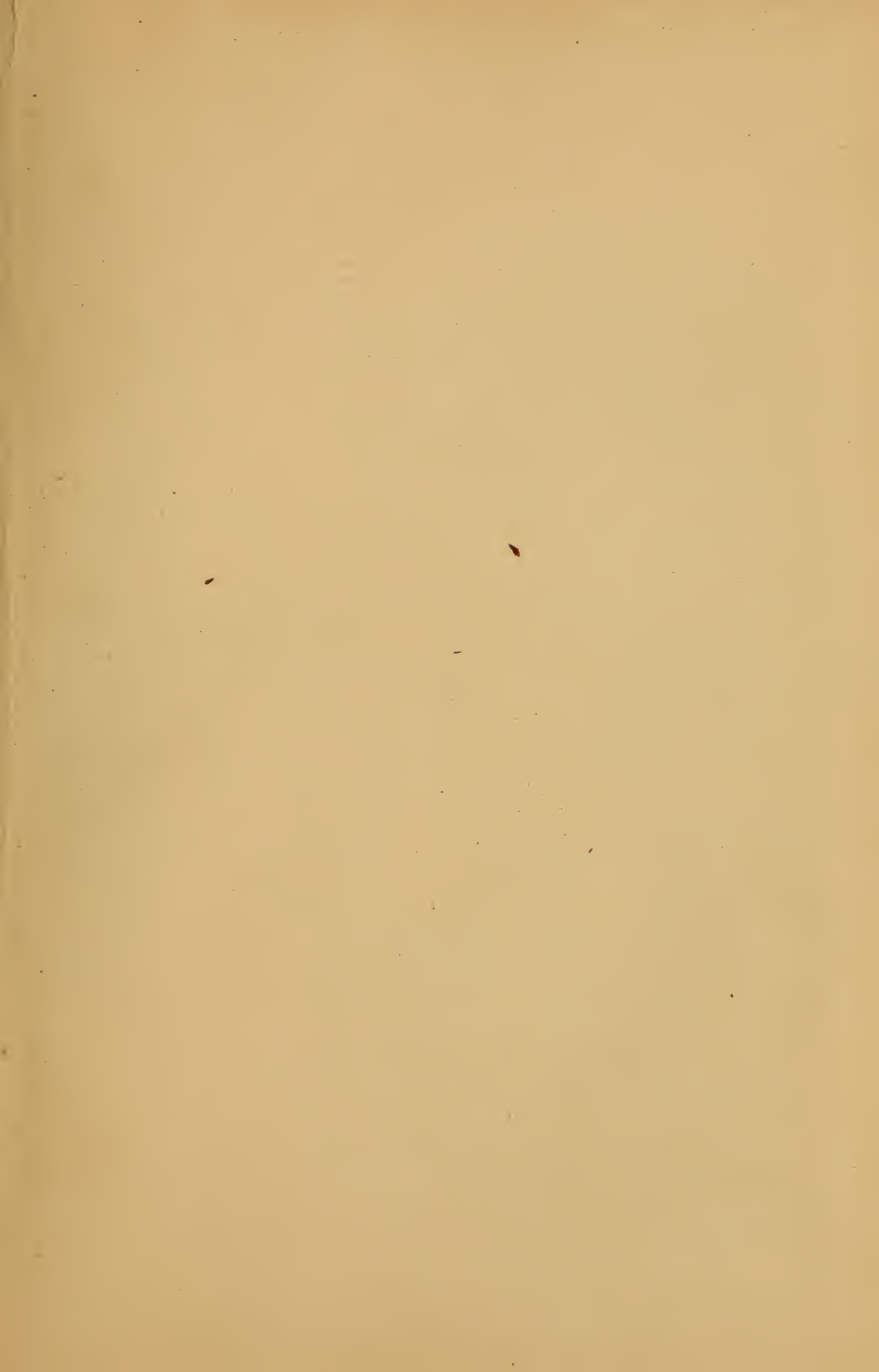
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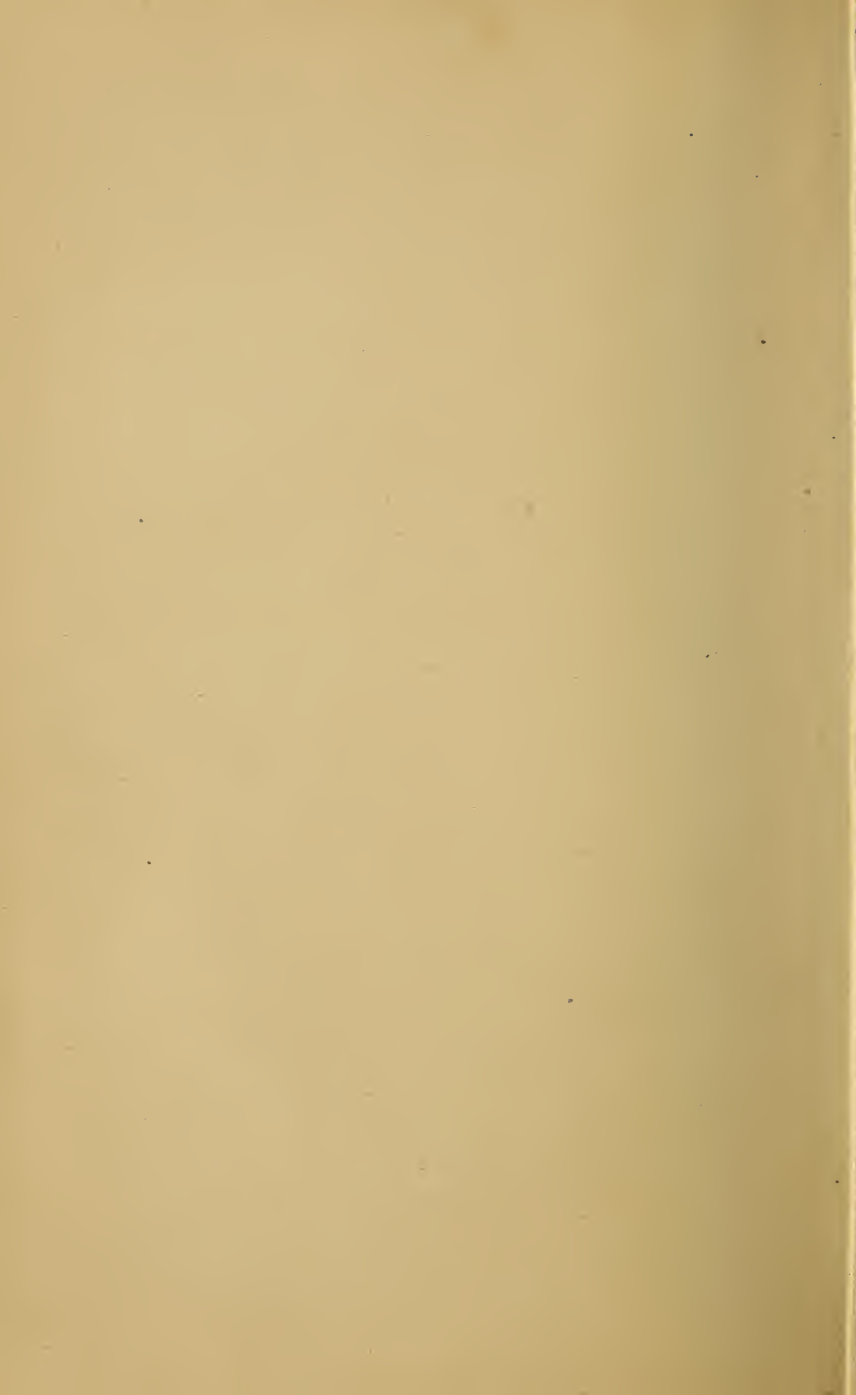
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THE
FRUIT OF THE VINE

BY

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CHRIST," ETC.

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THE FRUIT OF THE VINE.*

I. FRUIT.

“I am the True Vine, and My Father is the Husbandman. Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit, He taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, He cleanseth it.” — JOHN xv. 1, 2.

A VINE is planted solely for the sake of its fruit. There are many sorts of vines, each with its different sort of fruit. When a husbandman plants a vine or a vineyard, he selects that special sort of which he desires to have the fruit. The fruit will be the manifestation of his purpose. When God planted the Heavenly Vine, it was that its fruit might bring life and strength to dying men. The very life of God, which man had lost by the fall, was to be brought back to him by Christ from heaven; Christ was to be to men the True Tree of Life. In Him, the True, the Heavenly Vine, in His Word and work, in His life and death, the life of God was brought within reach of men; all who should eat of the fruit should live for ever.

* After I had written a little book just published, *The Mystery of the True Vine*, I felt how little I had realised or sufficiently emphasised the wonderful place that Fruit takes in Christ's teaching in the parable. In these six chapters on FRUIT, NO FRUIT, MORE FRUIT, MUCH FRUIT, ABIDING FRUIT, FRUIT AND PRAYER, I have tried in some measure to make up for what is lacking there. — A.M.

More wonderful still, Christ's disciples should not only eat and live, but in their turn again become fruit-bearing branches. The Divine life entering into them should not only dwell in them, but so assert its quickening power that it should show itself in the fruit they bear for their fellow-men. As truly as the Heavenly Vine, all its branches receive the life of God.

I. THE LIFE IN THE VINE.

We often speak of receiving Christ, following Christ, of Christ living in us, when our ideas of what Christ is are very vague. Christ gave Himself a sacrifice to God for men, and that proved what is the true nobility of man as partaker of the Divine nature. We speak, and rightly too, of the obedience of Christ as the meritorious cause of our salvation: "By the obedience of One many were made righteous." But we do not sufficiently recognise what it was that gave that obedience its redeeming power. It was this—that in it Christ restored that which is the one only thing that the creature can render to its Creator, and so rendered to God what man owed to Him. It is because of this obedience He became a Redeemer, and this disposition is the very life which as the Heavenly Vine He imparts. "Let this mind be in you, which was in Christ Jesus, who became obedient unto death. Therefore God hath highly exalted Him." The life of God in human nature is obedience to the death.

And with that Christ loved men. In that He fulfilled the will of God. He gave Himself to the mighty Redeeming love of God towards men, and so gave Himself as much to men as to God. There is no possible way of

living for God but by loving and living for the men whom He loves and lives for. The human life in Christ could be nothing but a surrender to His love to be used in saving and blessing men. Whether in God, or in Christ, or in us, the Divine life is love to men. This is the life-sap of the True Vine, the spirit that was in Christ Jesus.

II. THE LIFE IN THE BRANCH.

It is essentially and entirely the same as that in the Vine. If we would bear fruit, it can only come as the life and the power that work in the Vine work in us. This alone is the secret of effective service.

In Christian work a great mistake is often made. The difference between work and fruit is overlooked. Under a sense of duty or from an inborn love of work, a Christian may be very diligent in doing his work for God, and yet find little blessing in it. He may think of gratitude as the great motive of the Christian life, and not understand that though that may stir the will, it cannot give the power to work successfully. We need to see that if work is to be acceptable and effectual, it must come as fruit; *it must be the spontaneous outgrowth of a healthy, vigorous life*, the Spirit and power of Christ living and working in us. And that power can only work freely and effectually in us as our chief care is to maintain the relationship to our Lord close and intimate. As He streams His dispositions into us, our work will truly be the fruit the Vine bears.

Still another mistake is made. We pray very earnestly for God's blessing on our work and on those whom we wish to help. We forget that the God who delights to bless wishes to bless *ourselves first*, to give *into our*

hearts the blessing He wants to impart through us. We are not channels, in the sense in which a leaden or an earthen pipe is when it conveys water, and yet does not drink it in. We are channels in the way the branch is. The sap of the vine, before it goes through it to form fruit, first enters to be its life, to give it new wood and strength, and then passes on into the grape. When we preach the love of God and obedience to Him, when we call men to yield themselves to that love, we must first seek each day to be receiving afresh, in close communion with Christ Jesus, that love and devotion to God into our own hearts. When we teach love to man, we should do it as those in whom the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, is manifest in its freshness and beauty.

It is by having exactly the same spirit that was in Christ Jesus, and being possessed of the same mind and disposition that was in Him, that we can bear the same fruit He bore, that He can still bring forth fruit through us. And this spirit we cannot have by any imitation or effort, but only by receiving it fresh from Himself every morning and all the day. An intense devotion to God and an entire yielding up of ourselves to His service for men, and giving up of our life to live, and love, and die for men, as Jesus did, this is the life to which the branches of the True Vine are called, this is the life for which the True Vine will surely fit us. His words are true: He is the Truth and the Life. He gives all He promises. Count no time too precious and no pains too great, in waiting on Him by His Spirit to reveal to you the wondrous mystery of your being a branch, a partaker of the very Life there is in the Vine.

III. THE LIFE IN THE FRUIT.

If we have understood how the life in the Father, the Husbandman, and the life in the Son, the Vine, and the life in the Believer, the Branch, are, and cannot but be, one and the same, we shall easily see how it must still be the very same in the fruit the branch bears. It is of the utmost consequence to get a firm hold of this: *the life, and words, and works of a believer can carry the life of God and convey it to his fellow-men.* Our whole life, with all we are and do, can be the fruit of the Vine.

Character and Conduct are Fruit. The influence a holy life has, is Fruit. The reverence for God that is awakened by the presence of a truly godly man, the desire that is stirred to possess what they see in him and lack themselves, is Fruit. Every witness to the supreme claim of God's will, to the blessedness of full surrender and obedience, every act of Christ-like love and humility, every work in which the light of Christ's life shines out, is Fruit — the hidden sap of the heavenly Vine made manifest.

Words are Fruit. Christ not only lived, but He spake. Our life needs words to interpret its meaning, and give its message. The Christ in the heart must be confessed by the mouth. God's words living in the heart by the Holy Spirit, uttered by the lips, are the seeds of eternal life. As our life is the manifestation of the hidden life of the Vine, as the absolute surrender to God's will for His service among men, with the continuous dependence upon His presence and power fills the heart, the words will be with a heavenly power. The Divine Life in the Vine will be Divine Life in the Fruit, as the Branch, the connecting living channel, allows the Life to flow through unhindered.

Prayers are Fruit. There is perhaps no higher fruit than the power of intercession. With Christ it is the fruit of His work on earth: "He ever liveth to pray." It is the fruit of the presence in us of "the Spirit that maketh intercession." The reason that its power is so little believed and proved, that the wonderful unlimited prayer-promises of our Lord are practically regarded as not literally meant for us, is that we do not believe that the Divine life of the Vine is actually in us, flowing through us to men, rising up through us to God in prayer, bearing fruit that reaches even into heaven, and makes glad the heart of God.

Whatever be the fruit we bear, whether in the works we do or the words we speak, or the prayers we offer, do let us get hold of the truth, that all true fruit is in very deed the natural outgrowth of the life of Christ, under different forms. The life in Him and the Branch and the Fruit are most completely the same.

IV. THE LIFE IN THOSE WHO PARTAKE OF THE FRUIT

cannot be different. As the whole aim of vine and branch is to bear fruit that carries and imparts their life, so the object of eating the fruit is to receive the life. The obedience to God and the love to men, the sacrifice to God for men, which was in Christ and is in His true disciples the animating power, is what is offered men with the fruit. The redeeming power of His obedience and sacrifice, as it atoned for our sin, and reproduces its own spirit in all who believe, is what they must learn from us, and see in us, and receive from us. As this is done, they eat of the fruit of the very Tree of Life, borne to them by the branches. And so

the life they receive will have its character from that which is in the fruit. Where the abiding in the Vine is feeble, the fellowship with Christ on the part of the worker is not clear and unceasing, the fruit cannot be full and rich, and the life it brings to the converts will not be marked by true devotion to God and man. When, on the other hand, the life of the branches is in the power of the Spirit, and animated by intense desire for full conformity to Christ, the Vine, its character will reappear in those who have partaken of its fruit.

The great central truth we need to apprehend is, that the Divine life, whether as found in the Vine, or flowing through the Branch, or seen in the Fruit, or handled and partaken of by men, must be one and the same. And that, therefore, for each one who would truly live the branch life and bear much fruit, everything depends upon realising and maintaining the vital connection with the Vine. As this is done, all self-confidence and all discouragement will equally be conquered. As fellow-labourers with Christ in His great work of saving men, as branches who are no less ordained of God to carry life to men than Christ the Vine, we shall learn that our one need, as the one lesson of the parable, is unbounded faith. Faith will see that all that is in Christ is in us; that in our feebleness and our work we can count upon Christ's life and power working in us; that our life and fruit can indeed be full of His life and spirit. Such faith will lead us to maintain the contact with the Vine as closely and unceasingly as we see it in the earthly vine, and will grow up into a strong assurance that as naturally as the health and fatness of the earthly vine pass into the branches, will the fulness of Christ Jesus become our life and strength.

II. NO FRUIT.

“Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit, He taketh away.”
— JOHN XV. 2.

THE one object with which a husbandman plants a vine, and the vine has its place in the vineyard, is that it may bring forth fruit. The one object with which the branch has its place in the vine, is that it may bear the fruit the vine brings forth. The one object with which the Son of God became the Vine of God on earth was that He might bring forth fruit for the salvation of men. And the one object with which the believer is made a branch of the Heavenly Vine is that through him Christ may bring forth fruit, and bring it within reach of the hungry and the perishing. With the Husbandman, and the Vine, and the Branch it is all Fruit, Fruit, Fruit!

Immediately following on the opening words: “I am the True Vine, and My Father is the Husbandman,” our Lord uses the word three times. In the course of the parable the word occurs eight times, with the variations, “Fruit,” “No Fruit,” “More Fruit,” “Much Fruit,” “Abiding Fruit.” Everything points to the great truth that the heart of God is set upon this one thing, and that, as Christ is the Vine solely with this one purpose, so the one aim of the believer ought to be to bring forth much fruit. Let us enter upon our study of this, the key word of the parable, with the prayer that fruit may be to us nothing less than it is to God the Husbandman,

and Christ the Vine — the one blessed and all controlling reason for our being branches. If our insight into God's mind on this point be defective, our Christian life must suffer. As we are filled with the knowledge of God's will in this, in wisdom and spiritual understanding, our life can become wholly well-pleasing to Him.

“Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit, He taketh away.” No words could express more clearly than these, which come first after the opening announcement, “I am the Vine and My Father is the Husbandman,” the solemn truth that fruit is the one test of true discipleship, the only evidence that will be accepted on earth or in heaven of the reality of our union with Christ. Until a Christian sees this and its exceeding reasonableness, he does not know what the Christian calling is. The fruitless branch must be taken away: it is only by fruit-bearing that our place in Christ can be maintained.

To understand the reason why this should be so, let us notice

TWO THINGS ABOUT FRUIT.

The one is, *fruit is the natural spontaneous production of a plant*, the forthputting in visible shape of its hidden life and sap. If the life of the tree be healthy, there will be good and abundant fruit. The fruit simply reveals what is in the tree. In the fruit the tree gives is its own witness as to what its state and nature is.

The other characteristic of fruit is, that *the tree bears it not for itself but for the owner*. All true life, all existence, serves a purpose. By its fruit a tree fulfills its destiny of supplying the needs of men or animals. Fruit is what the tree gives away; in it, it returns to nature or to its master what has been spent upon it.

In both of these aspects fruit is the one great test of the Christian life, the true revelation of our inner state. All God-given life has in it something of the nature of the Divine life out of which it came. The life of God is a mystery, hidden and incomprehensible. But God reveals Himself in His works. And so man reveals himself in his works; conduct is everywhere the exponent of character; what a man does shows what he is. The inner life of the Christian is the resurrection life of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit: no one who apprehends this truly, and yields himself to it, but must bear fruit. What is said of Christ: "He could not be hidden," is true of all His people: the hidden life must break out.

And this not only for the manifestation, but for the communication, of life. The fruit is not its own end: in it the hidden life is embodied in such a form that it can impart itself to men. The fruit fulfils the universal law, imprinted by its Maker on all creation, the law of beneficence. Nothing lives for itself. God is Love, and lives not for Himself: He finds His life, His delight, His glory, in blessing His creatures. His Son is the embodiment of love and self-sacrifice. And God's redeemed children, how could the life and Spirit of Christ truly enter them without at once seeking to find its way to others in love and blessing?

Simple as these truths appear, it is astonishing and saddening to find how little they are understood, and preached, and practised. How many a one there is, who thinks of receiving Christ for himself, and not for others! He does not know that the Christ who comes into his heart is Christ the Saviour of all men, and that He has entered into him *solely with the view of through*

him carrying on His work of saving others. We may well ask such: "Is Christ divided?" Can you take a part of Christ, enough for yourself, and leave the rest for others, to be brought them or not, as may happen? Verily, no. Christ who loves all has come into you, to dwell in you with that love, to have and fit you for a vessel and instrument of that love, and its possessing your heart, and becoming your love to the perishing. The proof that you are a true branch of the True Vine, is your bearing His fruit for others: the proof of the presence of the True Christ within you, is the outgoing of your heart in love to those He loves. We are "saved to serve." But God does not need our service, *except in saving men.* We are saved to serve our fellow-men: that is God's true service. The sacrifice Christ gave of Himself was "to God for men"; that is the only true surrender we can make.

To many Christians, salvation means nothing but safety; salvation from sin and self. Salvation for the sake of God and men, salvation for fruit-bearing, is not thought of.

THIS SELFISH SALVATION

has been one of the great causes of continual feebleness in the Christian life, and of stumbling to men who are not Christians. If fruit be spoken of, it is chiefly as an evidence of being safe, or else as some return to be rendered to God in gratitude for what He has done. Fruit, to the glory of God and the blessing of men, *as the great object, the highest privilege, the sure and natural outcome of the life in Christ,* has almost no place in the scheme of life. And where it is thought of—for the words are too plain to be neglected—there it is often

sought after in human strength and wisdom. Christ said: "As the branch *cannot of itself* bear fruit, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in Me." *No fruit of itself*—the words reveal the reason there is so little fruit. Men seek it in their own efforts: they never come to apprehend and believe in and wait for that Divine and infallible supply of strength which comes through true, close, and continuous abiding in Christ, through living on and depending on Him alone. The words of our text are a warning to all Christians who make fruit a secondary thing, to see lest what they count their religious work be no fruit at all, not the spontaneous growth of a life hid with Christ in God.

"Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit, He taketh away." One of the terrible consequences of the comparative unfruitfulness of many Christians, and of the truth of fruit as indispensable to the true life not having the place it ought to have in the teaching of the Church, is, that multitudes of men are deluded into thinking themselves Christians, without any fruit at all. There is so little difference between them and those who make a distinct profession of being saved, that the lack of fruit does not trouble them; there is no clear testimony in the lives around them, that without fruit there can be no true salvation. If it were said to them that our salvation will be tested by our care for others, they would ask if works are to have any part in securing our final salvation. And yet this is what our Lord plainly teaches. The "Come ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you," has its ground in the "Inasmuch as ye have done it to the least of these." In the Sermon on the Mount, the good fruit is the "doing of the will of the Father." It cannot be too loudly and

urgently preached that the words of our Lord are literally and absolutely true: "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit, He taketh away." And that the call to conversion is a call to a life bringing forth fruits meet for repentance, a life of obedience to God, and beneficence to men. He redeemed us unto Himself for a people of His own possession, zealous of good works, "fruitful in every good work."

"Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit, He taketh away." It was not only as a warning to the individual that our Lord spake these words to the disciples, but to instruct them, as the future teachers of His Church, as to

THE PLACE FRUIT HAS IN THE MIND OF GOD,

and is to have in the teaching and care of His servants. It takes long before we realise that as definitely and exclusively as a husbandman plants a vineyard for the sake of its fruit, and as definitely as God planted the heavenly Vine for the sake of its fruit, *Every branch has its place in the Vine, only and solely for the sake of its fruit.* Fruit is the first consideration, it rules all the husbandman's labour; it decides the fate of every branch. "Every branch that beareth not fruit, He taketh away": this irreversible judgment of God is the overwhelming proof that nothing but fruit can satisfy Him.

If the truth were to take hold of believers, what sorrow would fill their hearts at the thought of all the unfruitful professors to be found in our churches! In the judgment of charity men are considered safe; it is hoped that the root of the matter is in them, while the evidences of the fruit of the Spirit, or even of the desire to

bring forth much fruit, are sadly lacking. We complain of the lack of interest in missions, of true self-sacrifice or earnest prayer for the salvation of men, of the difficulty of finding devoted spiritual workers among numbers of our respectable church members. We confess to a terrible increase of the worldly spirit that is ever spending more on comfort and luxury, while out of that abundance there is hardly anything for the extension of Christ's kingdom. Ministers will tell of congregations, containing many of whom they trust that they are Christians, and who will take some little part in work, and yet so few, if any, who possess the devotion or the spirituality that has the power or the will to sacrifice itself, and influence men for God. The lesson that every vine and every branch throughout the world teaches — we only are for the sake of our fruit — must enter into the Christian consciousness of our days.

It is especially among our converts and young Christians, our students and young ministers, that we must seek to let the word "Fruit" acquire power. The simple truth that nature teaches concerning it, with the Divine application Christ has made of it in the parable, if truly yielded to and acted on, would change our modern Christianity. God has created us for fruit-bearing, and, as Husbandman, fits us perfectly for it. Christ the Vine supplies all the life and strength we need. Abiding in Christ, close union to Christ, maintained in direct daily intercourse, will secure abundant fruit. A life of love and beneficence, a life given up to the welfare of others, is to be, not the end, but the beginning of our Christian crusade. As a race of Christians is trained, who in the childlike simplicity and restfulness of a faith that joyfully counts upon Christ to work all

this in them, the preaching: "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit, He taketh away," will make itself felt among the fruitless professors. For the simple reason, that the preaching can thus appeal to the witnesses who prove that Christ does make His people fruitful branches, Christ's solemn words about "no fruit" will come with the power of conviction and judgment, and waken in all the overpowering conviction: The only test for the judgment day will be — FRUIT.

III. MORE FRUIT.

“Every branch that beareth fruit, He cleanseth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” — JOHN XV. 2.

How clear that the heart of the Father, the Divine Husbandman, is set on Fruit! In the whole parable Christ does not speak of anything that the Husbandman seeks or does, but this one thing — He seeks more fruit, and directs His pruning or cleansing to this one end. As surely as His judgment takes away entirely the branch that bears no fruit, His judgment takes away whatever hinders the fruit-bearing. He prunes and cuts the branch that bears fruit, that it may bring forth more fruit. The Husbandman who made us branches of the Vine, and on whom we are entirely dependent for our fruit — let us seek to get into His mind and will. Not till fruit has exactly the same place in our heart as in His, not till we long for More Fruit as much as He does, not till we seek the cleansing as earnestly as He does, can we fully please Him, or taste the blessedness of the life He calls us to.

I am deeply persuaded that our Christian life, that the welfare of the Church and its power to bless, depend far more upon our taking God's view of the supreme importance of fruit-bearing than we think. Nothing is more needful than that the Church should learn, in all her preaching of redemption, to teach all to give fruit the place in their heart that it has in God's. I cannot repeat too often, and cannot beg too earnestly that all

would lay it to heart, what the parable of the Branch is meant to teach. As entirely as the vine, so the branch too exists only for fruit. As entirely as the natural branch, the believer as branch in the Heavenly Vine, has his place only to bear fruit for the salvation of sinners. Yea, more, as entirely and exclusively as Christ Himself was made a Vine, are we made branches, that we may carry God's Life and Love to men. God ever seeks one thing — "Fruit," "More Fruit."

This is not the ordinary view of the Christian's calling. According to that, our salvation is the chief thing. Fruit is a secondary matter — most desirable and needful as an evidence of being saved, as a proof of our gratitude, a mark of our meetness for heaven. But it is not regarded as the one thing for which we were made branches in Christ, the one sole aim and glory of the Christian life. The consequences of this mistake are terrible. The Church finds it impossible to wake up the majority of her members to take any real part in making Christ known to the heathen. The failure of our prayer and effort to secure the joy and strength of the life of faith is simply owing to this root-evil — we want it, in the first place, for ourselves more than for others.

A SELFISH RELIGION MAKES SELFISH MEN,

and the fruits of self and the flesh flourish everywhere. Even Christians who do work for God suffer greatly from not being possessed of God's thought, and do not live in the glad assurance that if fruit, God-given fruit, be the one object the Husbandman has, we can confidently expect to bear all the fruit He asks of us. The law of self-sacrifice, the branch spending and being spent for

the sake of its fruit, the fellowship with Christ in His crucifixion spirit, is not known in its power. Fruit is to be borne in subordination to our will and care and pleasure. "Fruit," "More Fruit," is not the Divine inspiration, the passion of our lives.

"Every branch that beareth fruit, He cleanseth, that it may bring forth more fruit."

Oh, our Father! open our ears and hearts to hearken to Thy Beloved Son, as He speaks of Thy desire for more fruit.

God desires more fruit. That may mean very different things to different people. To some it speaks of external work. The proportion of time and interest and money you give to God and His work in the world is so small, that the Father is not satisfied. You do as much work as you think your duty, as satisfies your conscience, as is conformable with your enjoyment of the world and pleasing self; you never dreamt of thinking, perhaps you never heard it preached, that, as a branch, all your energy, all your heart, all your love and delight ought to be the service of Christ, the bearing fruit for the life of men. God is calling for more fruit.

With others there is no lack of work. Some have given their life to it. Some are over-working, and exhausting themselves, more than the Father loves to see. And yet He says: "More Fruit!" He looks at the disposition and temper, and sees the fruits of the Spirit, love, and joy, and meekness, and humility sadly lacking. The personal fellowship with Christ, the obedience and surrender of the whole being to Him, the life entirely given up for men, these have not their fruit unto holiness, and He calls: "My child! less work, more fruit!"

With others, again, the message "More Fruit" points to wider circles of interest for which He would win their heart. It is possible to be very earnest about our little church, or some local interest of real importance, in which selfishness is in danger of being secretly fostered. God calls us in love and prayer and help to remember that the whole world is given to Christ, and has a right to know of Him, and has been entrusted to His Church. Every member of the body, while fulfilling its special duties, has time and strength and will find a rich blessing in enlarging its heart to love and take in all Christ loves and seeks to save. "More Fruit" is God's call to many a selfish church to live for missions.

There are others to whom the word may have still deeper meaning. In external work, in personal disposition and character, in large-hearted sympathy with all Christ's interests, these may appear to be all that can be looked for, while something else is lacking—the fruit which God is willing to give when His Spirit and Power are truly waited for and received. The "More Fruit" means indeed more of saving power in our ministry of love, more intense and abiding influence in those around us. It is not the word of a taskmaster who asks what we cannot give. It is the purpose of a Father, who in it holds out to us the higher blessing He is waiting to bestow.

God prepares for more fruit. "Every branch that beareth fruit He cleanseth it, that it may bring forth more fruit."* There is not a plant which so soon runs into wild wood, and needs such merciless and unceasing pruning, as the vine. The pruning or cleansing is not the removal of any extraneous evil hindering the growth.

* See *The Mystery of the True Vine*, p. 40.

It is the keeping down of excessive growth, the cutting off of the long shoots of the previous year, the removal of something that has been produced by the life of the vine itself. The cleansing takes away what is the proof of a vigorous growth, the honest, healthy wood of the vine. And why? Because it would consume too much of the sap of the vine on itself, and draw it away from its main object, the bringing forth of fruit. The branches, sometimes eight and ten feet long, are cut down to the least possible size, one or two inches, that the sap may be concentrated and the fruit be rich and large.

“Every branch that beareth fruit, the husbandman cleanseth, that it may bring forth more fruit.”

THE GREAT HINDRANCE IN THE VINE TO FRUIT-BEARING
IS WOOD-BEARING;

the unrestrained activity of the branch asserting itself, and seeking to grow large. The only means for securing much fruit, is keeping it small, by cutting away all the growth of its own self-will. The great hindrance in the life of the Christian worker is self-will and self-assertion. It is in the very desire to serve God, in the midst of diligence and activity in His work, that our own will gets strengthened, and we trust in what we are and do. No watchfulness or effort on our part can save us from this: *it is God who must cleanse the branches.* He alone can reveal to us how much there is of self-will and self-confidence, and how terribly it hinders our bearing fruit. *He alone can deliver from it,* in humbling us under a sense of the impotence and sinfulness of the self-life, in leading us to consent to our weakness, and to enter

into the death of Christ, as the only way to live unto God.

God asks more fruit. He not only desires it, and provides for it, He speaks to us of it and claims our intelligent, hearty consent and co-operation. The life of God in grace does not act as in nature, as an unconscious compulsion. God appeals to our will, to our heart. He asks the two things we have spoken of.

He asks for more fruit. He asks that we think of His one object with us, of His great desire to see more fruit, *and that we set our heart upon it even as He does.*

As we do this, and feel how impossible it is for us to attain to it, we shall learn to believe that He Himself will give us the grace, the quickened life, the abundant life, for the more abundant fruit-bearing. Our thought of His desiring more fruit will not only teach us what we ought to desire, but draw us to give ourselves up to wait on Him in the assurance that He will work it in us.

He asks for more fruit. He asks that we yield ourselves to His pruning, that we see how much there is of self, that we confess that this is the one great hindrance to His working through us, that we recognise that self cannot cleanse or kill self, and begin to desire and implore of Him, as His choicest mercy, that He stretch out His knife and purge us.

God's pruning knife is His WORD, "sharper than any two-edged sword, a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Christ says: "Ye are clean through the word I have spoken to you." We know how cutting, how piercing, many of these words were that He had spoken to the disciples. Think of His conditions of discipleship: "He that loveth father or mother more than Me, he that taketh not his cross — *is not worthy of*

Me," thrice repeated (Matt. x. 37, 38). "If any man come to Me and hate not his father, yea, and his own life also, and forsake not all he hath, he cannot be My disciple," thrice repeated (Luke xiv. 26-33). Think of all his heart-searching teaching on humility and love, and you will feel how God cleansed them through Christ's Word.

Oh! let us begin and plead with God for His Knife, for Himself to cleanse us. We may study the Word, and strive to apply it—that cannot cleanse us. The Living God, the Holy One who cleanses with the Spirit of Burning, He must do it.

Christian worker! are you yielding everything of self to God for Him to cut away, and cleanse with His Divine circumcision? Oh! are there not Christians praying for more fruit, praying even for the Holy Ghost and power from above, and who know not what it is to yield to the humbling, cleansing, slaying power of God's holiness?

Let us enter into His presence and give Him the two things He asks—a heart set upon more fruit, a will yielded up to Him to be pruned and purged and made free from self, and to be the living channel for the Life and Spirit of the Vine only and wholly to possess and use.

Nothing can possibly fulfil the Father's desire or yours for more fruit, but a full and a daily surrender to the Divine cleansing by God Himself. It is not till a deep longing for this Divine cleansing fills the Church, that the desire for more fruit can be realised to any large extent. Let God's call for more fruit find its response in the cry for full cleansing.

IV. MUCH FRUIT.

“He that abideth in Me, and I in Him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for apart from Me ye can do nothing” (verse 5).

“Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit, and ye shall be My disciples” (verse 8).

HERE we are led on a step further: the Husbandman is not content unless the “more fruit” becomes “*much* fruit.” What new emphasis this gives to the central thought of the parable and of the true Christian life, that bearing fruit for the life and salvation of men is to be the one object of existence. It is only as Christians give themselves up to this, that the need and the meaning and the reality of abiding in Christ can be apprehended. How earnestly we need to pray that God may grant, in the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, enlightened eyes of the heart that we may know the “hope of our calling,” to bear much fruit.

Our Lord twice speaks of the “much fruit.” He first tells how naturally it will come to them who abide in Him. Then He gives the double motive for it: the Father will be glorified, and we shall be true disciples. Let us study the call to bear much fruit, as it points to Christ, and our life of abiding in Him; to the Father, and our glorifying Him; to ourselves, and our becoming true disciples.

I.

“As the branch cannot bear fruit except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.” “*He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth*

much fruit; for apart from Me ye can do nothing." We have seen what a branch is: an outgrowth of the vine, partaker of its life, begotten and maintained as part of itself to afford a channel through which it can bring forth its grapes. And we regard nothing as more natural, or so much a matter of course, about which there cannot be a moment's doubt, as that the branch cannot bear fruit except it abide in the vine. The union with the vine must be continual and unbroken if the vine is unceasingly to maintain its supply of sap for the bearing and ripening of the fruit. Abiding in the vine is the one indispensable condition of being a living, healthy, fruit-bearing branch.

Every believer is a branch, an outgrowth of the Heavenly Vine, begotten and maintained as part of itself, with the one view of having a channel through which it can bring forth its life-giving fruit for the salvation of men. It is only as this nature and character of the branch is understood and accepted, that Christ's call to abide in Him can be apprehended. All attempts to enjoy the blessing of abiding will be futile as long as the first thought is our own happiness or holiness. Thousands may find in this truth the explanation of the failure of their many efforts and prayers to be kept abiding. A branch is only a means to an end; an instrument for the realisation of the purpose of the vine. Abiding is only a means to an end; the one only way in which the union of the vine and branch can be maintained for the realisation of their common object. Just in such measure as the believer enters into God's thought concerning himself as a branch, and heartily responds to it, will there come the insight into the possibility, the certainty, the blessedness of abiding.

It is here where our whole modern Christianity needs to be reconstructed. The Church must preach the great truth that every branch is to bear fruit because Christ needs him, and chose him for this purpose, and because this alone is the true life of Christ in us. Bringing forth fruit, doing work for Christ, living to save and bless men, must not be regarded as a matter of choice, or special devotion, or as the payment of a debt of gratitude: it is the one aim of redemption. It is the one proof that God is having His way with us, that the life of God is taking full possession of us, that we are, like Him, finding our joy in beneficence and love. Would God that believers would only take time to think what a branch is! They would begin to see — I repeat of set purpose what I have said before — and be amazed that they did not sooner see it, that the Heavenly Vine exists as absolutely as the vine on earth only for bearing fruit, that the branch exists just as much as the vine itself only for bearing fruit, *and that the believer lives as absolutely and exclusively as Christ Himself for bearing fruit, and bringing God's life and salvation to men.*

The power to abide depends entirely on our accepting our calling as branches. It is the branch, wholly devoted to the vine and to fruit-bearing, that is allowed, that is able, to abide. The surrender to be a branch *in the full meaning in which Christ uses the word*, will give a wonderful new light and force to the word "*Abide.*" It will then mean simply: maintain your place and position as a branch; live only and entirely to let Christ, through you, give life to the perishing. The believer who each morning says to his Lord that he comes afresh to yield himself as a branch to bear much fruit, will feel how utterly impotent he is of himself to do this — as

impotent as the branch "to bear fruit of itself." How sure and abundant "the supply of the Spirit" of the Heavenly Vine is that he may count on, and how simple it is, in view of these two truths, to continue abiding, to continue in the life of absolute surrender and unceasing, believing dependence.

Christ said: "If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love, even as I kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love." Christ's abiding in God's love was through abiding in His will to save the world; our abiding in Christ's will to save men, giving ourselves up in obedience to live for them, will be our abiding in His love. We shall learn to count it our highest privilege each day to lose our life in His life, and our will in His will, and we shall, like Him, bear much fruit. "He that abideth in Me, and I in him, beareth much fruit." Abiding in Christ, going out of ourselves and everything to be entirely identified with Him in His life of saving men, losing and giving up every interest for the sake of serving Him as a branch, and of having Him abide in us, will infallibly make us fruitful branches. It will no longer be a thing of inward strain or effort, but the simplicity and ease of the fruit-bearing of the natural branch will be transfigured into the rest and joy and love through which He brings forth His fruit in us. "He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit."

II.

"Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." This is Christ's second thought concerning the "much fruit."

And how does it glorify the Father? In the same

sense in which it is said, "The heavens declare the glory of God." They do this effectually by simply showing forth what God is doing through them, yielding themselves to His Divine Power that maintains them and gives them their beauty. God gives of His glory unto them, and by what they are and do in virtue of God's power they manifest His glory.

Even so Christ glorified the Father on earth. He not only did the Father's will. He might have done that, and men might have thought that He did it by His own power. How careful He was to say again and again that *He did nothing of Himself*, that His words and works were all of the Father who dwelt in Him. And continually people glorified God, when they saw His mighty deeds. In His great Intercessory Prayer our Lord said: "Father! glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son may glorify Thee." It was only if and as the Father gave His glory to the Son, that the Son could glorify Him — that is, could show forth His glory.

In no other way can the Father be glorified by us. We cannot cause or create any new glory for God: as God, all glory is His. "Thine is the glory." But we can yield ourselves to God to work in us, and let men see in us how glorious He is, and how gloriously He works. "Herein is My Father, the Husbandman, glorified, if ye bear much fruit." The "much fruit" is the proof of how wise and successful the Husbandman is. As long as we bear little fruit, and our Christian life does not differ very greatly from others around us, men attribute our work to natural character or favourable circumstances, or the beneficent influence of our religious beliefs. But when in the heavenliness of our life, and in abounding fruitfulness, proof is given of something

supernatural, men are compelled to say: This is the Lord's doing; and God is glorified.

Christ sets this before His disciples as a distinct object. That God might be glorified was His one object: He wants it to be ours. That God can only be glorified by an entire devotion, and the giving up of the whole life for Him to work in, was what His life and death proved. He wants us equally to prove it. As the Vine of God's planting, He lived every moment to bear much fruit to the glory of the Father. As the Branches of God's right hand, as the Branches of Himself, the Heavenly Vine, Christ counts upon us equally to seek nothing less, to seek nothing else. The whole life of the Vine and its fruit is to the glory of the Father; the whole life of the Branch need be, may be, nothing less.

Let us pause, and pray, and take it in: With God the Husbandman working in me according to the riches of glory, with Christ the Vine strengthening me according to the glory of His power, I can bring forth much fruit. Let me believe in the glory of what the God of glory will do in me, and yield myself each morning to show forth His glory in me: I shall learn to abide in Christ, and bring forth much fruit.

III.

"Bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples." Much fruit makes us disciples, true disciples such as Christ would have us.

There are many sorts of disciples—sickly, feeble, half-hearted, unfaithful disciples. There are disciples worthy the name—men and women such as Christ would have them be, His whole-hearted followers, such as *He*

calls disciples. They are those who bear much fruit, to the glory of the Father, branches who bear the likeness to the Vine, and prove that they possess its very nature.

How little this is realised in the Church of Christ, that *much fruit is the mark of true discipleship.* We have so many excuses for our feebleness and lack of fruit, we are so accustomed to the power of sin and the world, so satisfied with the tokens of good amid the prevailing low standards, that the thought of bearing much fruit to win Christ's approval, as true disciples hardly enters the mind of many. And yet, if the parable of the Vine means anything, it means this, *that every branch can and must bear much fruit.* The fruit may be very different: in one patient suffering, in another active service and self-sacrifice, in some persevering intercession, in others a manifest humility, and gentleness, and heavenly-mindedness; but in all much fruit—this is what abiding in Christ inevitably secures, what glorifies the Father, what gives us the assurance that we are well-pleasing to the Master. Surely the question ought to come home to each of us individually: Am I bearing much fruit? At least, am I seeking it with my whole heart?

“Much fruit.” What we truly desire, what we seek with the whole heart, we sacrifice everything for. Let us be still in the presence of our Lord, and repeat to ourselves the great thoughts His words suggest. He is the Vine of heaven, come to earth to bring the fruit, the life of heaven, to men. He has brought it to me. He has made me a branch, to impart that life through me and the fruit I bear. He has appointed me and fitted me for bearing much fruit. By the glory of the Father, by the blessedness of an unbroken abiding in Him, by the honour of being His true disciple, He pleads with

me to bear much fruit. He asks nothing but that I yield myself wholly to Him, that day by day I depend on Him and the Father to do their perfect, mighty work in me. Shall not I, whatever others do — shall not I consent and say: Lord! here I am, to be only and wholly, to be hourly and uninterruptedly, a branch in Thee, abiding in close communion, only seeking to know and do Thy will, and ever depending on Thee in the confident assurance that Thou wilt make me a Branch worthy of Thyself, bearing much fruit.

V. ABIDING FRUIT.

“Ye did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that ye should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide.”
—JOHN XV. 16.

“FRUIT,” “More Fruit,” “Much Fruit,” Abiding Fruit! How the heart of Christ is set upon fruit! And it is not only quantity that He seeks, but quality too; not only much fruit, but fruit that may abide. And He speaks these words that by the Holy Spirit His mind may enter into us, and fruit take the same place in our heart that it has in His.

“*That your fruit should abide.*” The word warns against a possible, an imminent danger. When trees are not perfectly healthy, or are suffering from drought, they sometimes drop their fruit. The trees may bear much fruit, but are not able to ripen it: the fruit does not abide. Or there may be fruit that, when once ripe, will not keep: it does not abide. It must be used at once, while other sorts will keep, and can bear being carried far, or can be stored for use in winter. Or, again, there are trees that bear fruit only for a few years, and then fail, while others continue fruit-bearing till old age: then fruit abides as long as they live.

These failures in Nature have their counterpart in the Kingdom of Grace. Both in individuals and in Churches fruit may often be found that does not abide. You see Christians who begin well and are very zealous in their work for God, but it does not last: they do not bring

their fruit to perfection. As the years go on there is no maturity or mellowness about it. The influence they exert is not permanent, the result of their work is a transient impression, nothing abiding. In course of time they grow weary and faint; they do not "bring forth fruit in old age."

What is seen in individuals is often the mark of whole churches and their services. In the impressions made by the preaching, in the influence exerted by the Sunday school, even in the results of special missions or revival services, little abiding fruit is seen. Christ meant that the branch that abides in Him should bear fruit that abides, should have permanent results for time and eternity. Where the connection between Christ and the believer is close and the communication unceasing, the power and reality of the Divine life in the Vine, flowing through the branch, is to be seen in the fruit; that work in its permanence is to bear the stamp of eternity.

"The world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God," and what he doeth, "abideth for ever." There is a religion that is in harmony with the spirit and the wisdom of the world, and makes a fair show in the flesh, but speedily fades and fails. There is a religion which has its root in God and Christ, which can resist temptation and overcome the world, because it is of the faith which does not "stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." Let us listen to what our Lord has to teach us about the fruit that abides, and learn from Him how we can bear it.

I.

"I appointed you that ye should go, and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide." Here Christ speaks of our

fruit abiding as the result of our being appointed by Him to bear fruit. We speak of a man who has received an appointment to an important spot here on earth, first accepting it, then taking it up, and then giving his time and his life to the fulfilment of its duties. On his faithfulness depends his influence and his promotion. One great secret of our fruit abiding is, that we know that Christ has appointed us to bear fruit, and that with our whole heart we accept and take up the appointment. It is the Christian who indeed lives as one "appointed to bear fruit," whose fruit will abide.

But is not this what every earnest minister and worker believes, and proves that he believes by the very fact of his taking up Christian work? I fear not. Let us remember what has been spoken of in a previous chapter, that there are two different points of view from which the bearing of fruit may be regarded.

Some realise, or seek to realise, that their appointment of Christ to bear fruit is just as clear and simple and absolute as that of the man whom the Queen appoints to be a governor, or an officer in the army: it implies his giving his whole time and attention to this one thing; he lives for it.

Others think that such an entire devotion to fruit-bearing is only expected of those who are set apart for the ministry, or who choose thus to live. They have never seen that the relation between the branch and the fruit is universal and unchangeable.

It is easy to understand what the different effect will be of these two modes of looking at fruit-bearing. In the one case a man's care and unceasing prayer will be to bear fruit, more fruit, much fruit, abiding fruit. Everything will be subordinated to this: for this alone

he lives. In the other he lives for himself in the first place. Whether in the pursuit of earthly or heavenly things, self-interest is his chief aim and motive, and fruit takes the second place, a part of what he chooses to seek. The former view leads a man to a life of absolute consecration and unceasing dependence. The latter leaves abundant room for self and its activity.

"I appointed you that ye should go, and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide." Shall we not ask that this word "appointed to bear fruit" may be as a sharp two-edged sword, cleaving us as branches from all that is of self? We have more than once said, *the branch of the Heavenly Vine exists as exclusively and absolutely for the bearing of fruit as does the natural vine-branch, or as does the Heavenly Vine Himself*. It is only the Holy Spirit that can make the thought a living truth within us, so that we truly feel as closely united to Christ, as entirely devoted to Him, as a branch on earth is to its vine. Let us wait in earnest prayer for the Holy Spirit to work this in us; let us day by day yield ourselves to the Living Christ as "appointed to bear fruit." He will give us the living spiritual consciousness of our calling, and the power to fulfil it. That abiding conviction will be the first step towards abiding fruit.

II.

"*Ye did not choose me, but I chose you*, and appointed you, that ye should go and bear fruit." Here is a second thought.

The knowledge that we have been "appointed" to bear fruit is a mighty power; but there is something deeper. Christ points to the Divine origin of our call-

ing to bear fruit. It might have been that we had chosen Him as Lord, and offered ourselves for His service. The appointment would then have had its rise in our will. But no — “Ye did not choose Me, but I chose you.” As little as a branch chooses the vine on which it grows, did we first seek or choose Christ. As each vine brings forth and sets the branch in the place it chooses, so each branch in Christ has become such in virtue of His election. To believe this with our whole heart, to allow the Holy Spirit to work this faith into our inmost being, is of more practical consequence for the Christian life than we think. It will show us how our being “appointed to bear fruit” has its root in the eternal purpose of God, and how in that we have the security for our being able to fulfil its requirement.

Christ chose us “according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will.” The God who has purposed is the God who also performs. He carries out His purpose Himself by working all that He has willed. He has given man, redeemed man especially, the wonderful power of willing, and so within certain limits hindering or serving Him. Whenever we enter into His will and give ourselves up to it, then we can count upon it that He will Himself, through Christ, work in us all that is well pleasing in His sight, all that He would really have each of us be.

In this light the doctrine of election becomes one of the utmost practical importance and of deep spiritual quickening and fruitfulness. As in adoring faith I see my personal life embraced in God’s eternal purpose in Christ, as the heavenly truth possesses me that I have been appointed to bear fruit, not in virtue of my fitness or my having offered myself for it, but because God and

Christ saw fit to choose me for it, the call to give myself up to live alone for this comes with irresistible urgency, and the confidence is begotten that I can bear just as much fruit as God would have me do. His election does no violence to my liberty or my will; its Divine glory enlightens and draws and strengthens my will to yield itself wholly to the mighty power of the good and perfect Will. I am a branch chosen and appointed by the Vine to bear fruit. I can count on Him to work all in me that He wishes me to be.

III.

“*That your fruit may abide.*” The word *abide* suggests a third lesson. Christ has used it ten times in the parable already of our abiding in Him and His love, and of Himself and His joy abiding in us. Here He uses it of our fruit abiding. The connection is evident. The fruit of a tree depends upon its life. As our life abides in Him, our fruit will abide. The more entirely it is Christ’s own fruit, His working in us, the more the power of His unchangeable life will be manifest in it. Fruit that abides comes from a branch that abides.

This brings us back to the great lesson of the parable — “Abide in me, and I in you.” It is the Christian worker, who *intensely and entirely abides in Christ*, who turns away from everything to take up his election and appointment to go and bear fruit, and makes it the first, the one, the only thing he lives for, to whom the secret of abiding fruit will be imparted. There may be others with greater gifts to whom apparently more visible fruit is given: the abiding fruit, as it will be seen in the light of eternity, will be according to the abiding life of the Vine in which it abides.

What a solemn, blessed call to all who would be true branches of the True Vine, as true as the Vine is true, true disciples, bearing much abiding fruit. Our whole life must be abiding in Christ, as simply, as naturally, as exclusively as yonder branch abides in its vine. I trust we begin to see more what abiding means. It means making Christ everything for every moment, hating and losing our life, forsaking all to follow Him, to be with Him, near Him, in Him, perfectly like Him.

And can we thus abide? Rather, how can we not, if we believe in and yield to the Blessed Holy Spirit, who has been given us to make Christ all to us and in us that the Father meant Him to be. As the branch is still and waits and receives what the vine gives, let us be still in the faith that the Holy Spirit is in us. In ever drawing nigh to Christ, and in all our desire after Him, let us count upon the Holy Spirit to enable us to believe and abide as we should. Let us cry mightily to God "to strengthen us with might by His Spirit in the inner man," to "fill us with the Spirit." Let us take time each day to believe that as we yield ourselves to abide, Christ does abide in us; that He dwells in our heart by faith. We shall become increasingly sure that our fruit is from Him, that He Himself is working in us, and that our fruit will abide. The more of the abiding life, the unchangeable eternal life, the more of abiding fruit, with the power of eternity in it.

"*That your fruit may abide.*" In view of so much work of which the fruit is so short-lived, in view of so many backsliders, of Christians who "go backward and not forward," because "they have lost their first love," is not the great need of the Church in its members and converts, in Christian and heathen lands, the one word,

“that your fruit may abide”? Let each of us pray for it and live for it. As we hear of souls willing, sometimes hungering, to know of Christ and His full salvation, let us pray that we may not only give them words and thoughts that are true, but may impart to them the very thing they seek—may give them the heavenly fruit of the heavenly Vine. This can be as day by day, it is our first care to be full of Christ, to let Him live and work in us. The branch that abides in Him, truly, closely, fully, wholly, will bear fruit that abides, because the very life of Christ brings it forth.

VI. FRUIT AND PRAYER.

“Ye did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that ye should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My Name, He may give it you.” — JOHN xv. 16.

IN these the closing words of the parable, Christ speaks of two things to which He has chosen and appointed His disciples. The one is that they should bear fruit that abides; the other, that they should pray prayer that prevails. Fruit on earth that carries in it real power to prevail with men, prayer in heaven that carries in it power to prevail with God — such is the aim and purpose, such will be the outcome to those who in simple faith make their election and appointment sure.

Abiding fruit for men, prevailing prayer with God — it is not difficult to see the connection. Christ is not speaking here of the prayer that is needed for and before fruit-bearing. As an exercise of the spiritual life, as a means of obtaining grace for the abiding and the fruitfulness, such prayer is unspeakably needed and blessed. Nevertheless it is not the highest form of prayer, and, if we confine ourselves to it, the result will be a failure in the higher regions of spiritual activity, and in the power to grasp fully the higher prayer promises. Read the text carefully, and you see at once Christ speaks of a power of prevailing prayer that comes with and after fruit, and is in part a reward for it. It is in intercessory prayer that the Christian life reaches its full maturity

and exercises its highest power. It is the believer who has given himself wholly to the life of abiding and fruit-bearing, and who bears fruit that abides, to whom the power will come fully to take in and avail himself of the promise: "I have appointed you that ye should bear fruit, and that your fruit may abide: *that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you.*"

This is the second time Christ speaks of prayer in the parable. He said, "He that abideth in Me, the same bringeth forth much fruit." "If ye abide in Me, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." The abiding was to bring the double blessing — power to bear much fruit, power to prevail in prayer. The close union to Christ manifests itself in two ways — on earth in the outflow of His life and strength as fruit for men; in heaven as power in His name to obtain for men from God what we will. The same spirit of devotion to the glory of God and the welfare of men that manifests itself in seeking to be a branch, entirely given up to Christ, through which He can bear fruit, feels constrained and has confidence to enter boldly and ask great things of God. Not every minister or worker who labours diligently and earnestly, but every one who works in the true branch-like dependence on Christ and direct obedience to His will, will find the liberty for the ministry of intercession. This is the deep and full meaning of the words so often connected — Working and Praying.

It is of consequence that we realise the connection between the two. Look at our Lord Jesus. His work of redemption on earth is the basis and the strength of His work of intercession in heaven. In giving Himself up to God for men, He proves Himself worthy of having the power of unlimited intercession put into His hands.

Unmeasured devotion to God and men, the most complete self-sacrifice on their account, was His preparation for receiving the keys of the Kingdom and the fulfilment of the promise, "Ask of Me, and I will give Thee." He submitted Himself to the law under which His people stood, and opened the way for their sharing with Him in His power. There is for them no other way. It is easy to pray, as long as we have not given ourselves to be wholly branches, to bear much fruit; but the prayer will avail little. Christ's words are plain and solemnly true: "I have appointed you that ye should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you."

"We must remember," says Mr. Coillard in his "ON THE THRESHOLD OF CENTRAL AFRICA," "that it was not by interceding for the world in glory that Jesus saved it. *He gave Himself*. Our prayers for the evangelisation of the world are a bitter irony so long as we only give of our superfluity, and draw back before the sacrifice of *ourselves*."

I.

The chief privilege of the branch life, the highest exercise of its power, is intercession. Such is the first thought suggested.

It cannot be otherwise. In our abiding and fruit-bearing we have to do more directly with Christ the Vine. But He wants to lead us on to such a personal access to and intercourse with the Father as He Himself enjoyed: "At that day ye shall ask in My name; and I say not I will pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loveth you." Intercession is His crown-

ing glory, the work He does upon the throne. For us to have access to God, to have power with God, to ask whatsoever we will, and have it given — this is the glory that excelleth. To enter within the veil and dwell there, there to enter into God's mind and love and promises, thence to look out upon the world and its needs, then every day to offer ourselves to God for men, and then to pray in power for the Spirit for ourselves and those around us — this is the true life in Christ Jesus.

This is the gift of which the Church so greatly needs a larger measure. It is the lack of this boldness and perseverance of intercession that takes the, "*Ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you,*" in simple earnest, and seeks to prove its truth to the utmost, that is the cause of our lack of power. Shall we not gird ourselves to take up our double appointment, "*that ye bear fruit that shall abide: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may do it*"? Shall we not rather — for we have often done our utmost to take hold of these promises — shall we not rather ask and trust, and in stillness wait for the Holy Spirit to give the very truth and spirit of these words as a living fire within us, so that it be not so much a matter of memory or purpose, but the outcome of an inward and spontaneous life power, to bear abiding fruit that we may pray prevailing prayer? To the soul abiding in Christ the devotion to much fruit-bearing for men will give the power for much intercourse with God.

II.

This will be our second lesson: *Faithfulness in abiding and fruit-bearing is the indispensable condition of power in intercession.*

“Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things” — this is the law of the Kingdom. It is the man who is faithful over a few things, in what is nearest, in his own personal abiding in Christ and his fruit-bearing for those around him, who will be set over many things, and have the power given for real prevailing intercession in wider circles. John says, “If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” Faithfulness in the lesser, in our conduct toward the brother near us, is the only way to reach the higher fellowship with the unseen God. We cannot impress it on ourselves too deeply — our power of access as intercessors, our power of prevailing prayer with God in heaven, depends on a life given up to fruit-bearing for men.

What light this throws on all the parable has taught us about fruit! Here you have the reason why the Father cleanses us that we may bear more fruit, why the Son calls us so urgently to abide in Him and bear much fruit. It is that we may be led on to the higher honour of standing in God’s counsel — may we not say, becoming His Privy Councillors, whom He admits to a share in the rule of the world, and whose will He allows a voice in the distribution of His blessings?

Let us seek to combine the two things. Let all our desire to abide in Christ and bear fruit that abides point us on to the still higher grace of intercession — seeking and obtaining from God His heavenly blessing in greater power. And let all our intercession ever lead us back to the question whether our life is indeed a branch life, as wholly given to abiding and fruit-bearing as the natural branch, or as the Heavenly Vine Himself. Rest not till that question has had a clear and full answer.

III.

It is this abiding and fruit-bearing as the condition of intercession, that is meant and summed up in the word the "Name of Christ." The promise Christ gives that the fruit-bearer shall receive from the Father whatsoever he shall ask is limited to prayer "*in My Name.*"

We all know the force of the expression, "It is all a mere name." How much there has been in prayer of the use of Christ's Name in which it has been but a name, and nothing more; or in which the use of the Name has been limited to certain thoughts about Him; or of the vain effort to use it in our strength, without the God-given faith that alone can speak it aright!

And what then does that Name mean, and what does its use imply? A name always supposes the object, the reality, the living person to which it applies. When I take the Name of Christ on my lips in prayer, it means that I have the living Christ Himself there. He said, "If ye *abide in Me*, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you." On earth we sometimes use the name of an absent person as our plea. In prayer to God this is not so. It is a present Christ whose Name we plead — present with God, present with us. The two conditions of prevailing prayer Christ mentions in the parable are eventually one — "*If ye abide in Me*," and "*In My Name*" ask what ye will, and it shall be done. They both express the same thing, living union to Christ. The name always expresses the nature. And how can I wield this mighty power of God, asking what I will, and getting it, except as the life and nature and power of the Son of God work in me?

As I am called to use that Name, I need to waken my

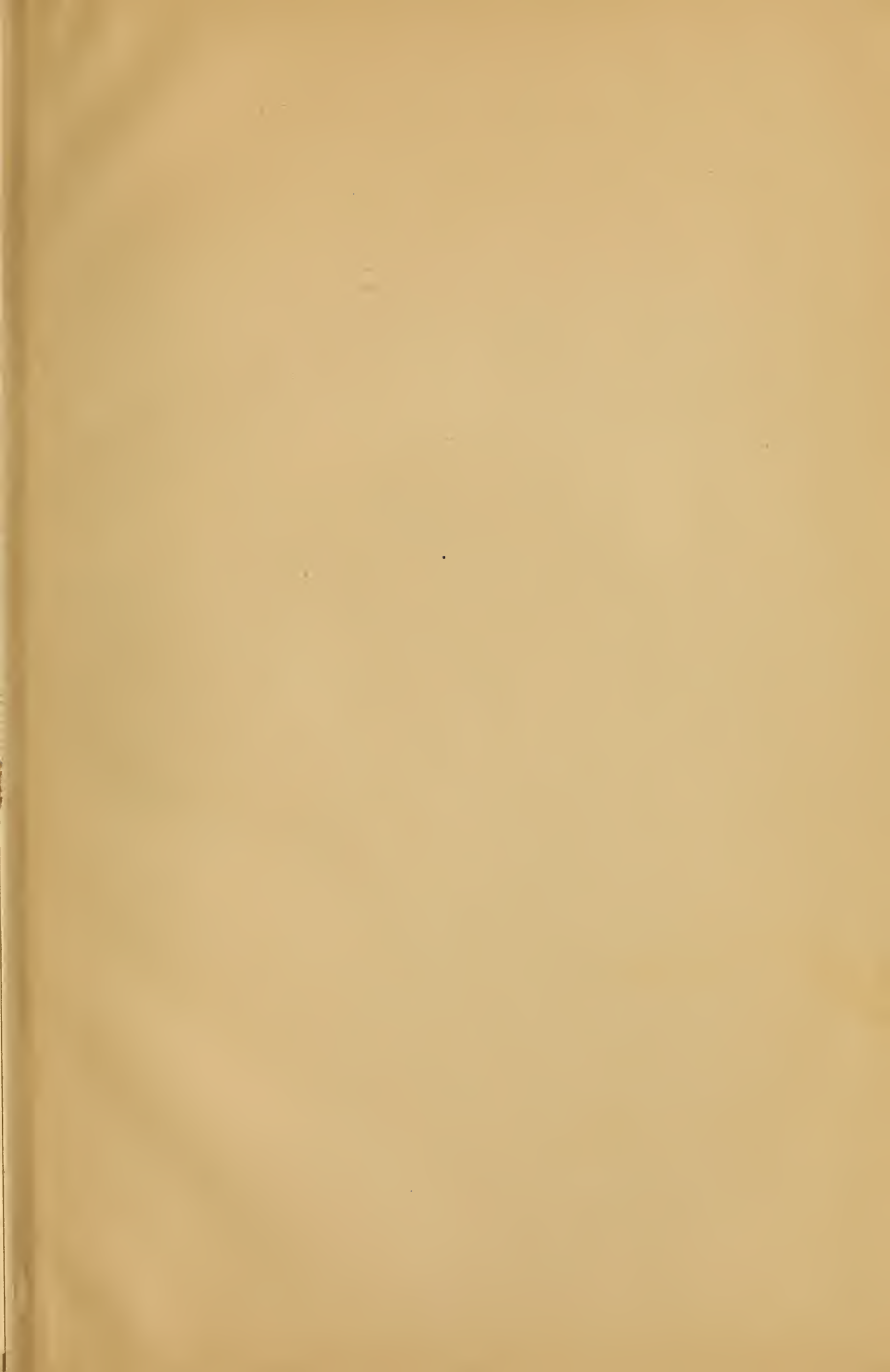
consciousness to the fact of how entirely it is Christ that brings me nigh to God, to stir my faith to the confident assurance that I am indeed in Christ, and Christ in me, and that therefore my prayer will be heard. God's judgment of what the Name of Christ really is to me depends on what He sees of the abiding in Him. While to the unconverted or the new-born feeble Christian the Name is given as their plea, when they know nothing but His blessed atonement and righteousness, in these special prayer promises, for the work of the kingdom and its extension through intercession, the Name means a great deal more. "*If ye abide in Me*, ask whatsoever ye will and it shall be done to you"; "that whatsoever ye shall ask the Father *in My Name*, He may give it you." The Name of Christ, proved to be true in us by abiding and fruit-bearing, is the power of prevailing prayer.

We have come to the end of our meditations. We have, I trust, learnt the great truth the parable teaches — that, as surely as every vine and its every branch exists only for the sake of its fruit, so Christ the Heavenly Vine and His every Branch exists solely to bring forth fruit for the salvation of men. And with that the other truth, which is its complement — that for our abundant fruit-bearing to the glory of God the most abundant and sufficient provision has been made in Christ Jesus. We must bear fruit; we can bear much fruit.

As we now turn to be not hearers only but doers, and ask how we are to enter upon this life of much fruit-bearing, let us beware of one mistake. Do not begin at the wrong end. The branch stands between the vine and the fruit. I have often repeated the thought. Set your heart on fruit as God's heart is set upon it. But

beware of beginning by looking at what you think you can do. The result will probably be the fear that you are as far from bearing much fruit as ever. Let me say to every young believer who would learn to live out the parable to the full: Turn to Jesus the Heavenly Vine. Fix your eye on Him *and the certainty that He will work all in you*. Fix your heart on God the Husbandman, who *will care for you as He cares for Jesus*. "He that believeth on Me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." Believe in Christ Jesus, and streams of living sap will flow through you, and out of you in fruit. Do, as a true disciple, yield yourself to the Vine to be as entirely set apart for fruit-bearing as He is: He will fill you with His heavenly life.

Let us all cry mightily to God that the great and mighty truth may be revealed fully in us, and around us in the Church, by His Holy Spirit. Let us live as witnesses for it. Let us seek especially for grace when we have access to young Christians or influence over them, to train them for this most blessed life — being true fruit-bearing branches of the True Vine.



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